




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

Record of Proceedings, 25 October 2022

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Traeger Electorate, Water Infrastructure

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (8.27 pm): I represent one of the largest seats in Queensland. The reason it is a large seat is primarily from population decline. If you look at population stats, the population keeps declining in these areas and that is why you keep getting expansion of those electorates. You wonder why it happens. We need a lifeline from the government. You look at the resources and how do we get a way out of this. Successive governments keep throwing cash. There is the Works for Queensland and it is welcomed, it is nice, but it is not a sustainable model. You cannot keep propping these towns up with cash; you need to enable industry. It is why I get really angry when we try to do something like the HIPCo project in Hughenden. All the government can do, whether it is tacit effort, is to stand there reluctantly while the water department makes these decisions.

I thought in Queensland our departments would work to enable these sort of things to happen. It is the exact opposite. Go ask anyone out there in the industry: are they there to help or are they there to stop it? Apparently they are there to stop things. They will find a way to kill any project you do out there. If you want to get irrigation going on, we have about 24 million hectares of Mitchell grass plains out there. That is all farming country. It all has potential for dry land or irrigated farming. Do you realise the potential that could bring towards Australia's wealth, for the employment opportunities, how you can enable those communities and make them sustainable? You do not have to pour cash into them, just give us some access to that water that flows out to the sea. It does not go into the reef, it goes out into the gulf waters. We just want a little bit of that 3.8 million megalitres a year. If the water is running four metres over the Flinders River, we want that little bit that runs that far over the bridge. That is all we need to fill some dams, keep some water for when we get a protein drought and we can all have a win.

They do not have to do much. They do not even have to spend any money. We can self-fund a lot of these things. We have the HIPCo project there—my father and the federal government secured \$180 million for that—the Big Rocks Weir and Hells Gates. However, they are successfully managing to kill all these projects. With the HIPCo project the population of Hughenden is projected to double under it. It is one of the only big elements we have to progress this region. Demand for the project is very strong with the project scheme oversubscribed. It has a BCR of 1.04. It will create over 1,900 new direct and indirect jobs related to agriculture. It will generate about an additional \$170 million of gross agricultural production per year. It will employ more than 2,500 people over its three-year construction period.

Irrigators are willing to contribute \$127 million of the up-front capital cost and 100 per cent of the ongoing operating and maintenance costs. This builds resilience in the agricultural industry by having diversity and there will be dryland farming accompanying it. It is a project that does not run onto the Great Barrier Reef. If they do care about net zero by 2050, which we do not particularly, it will achieve it. It is the first irrigation scheme—

Mr Hinchliffe: Ha, ha!

Mr KATTER: That is funny? This is really funny because these towns are dying and we are trying to keep them alive. The minister might agree with net 2050 or whatever; that is fine. I am trying to tell him that this scheme is carbon neutral. It is a world first net zero irrigation scheme.

Mr Hinchliffe interjected.

Mr KATTER: The minister does not want to hear it because he will tacitly sit there and approve all this.

Honourable members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Bush): Order, members.

Mr KATTER: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am wound up because we have some little windows of opportunity to do some of these things and these departments come in here and rip the guts out of everything. We front up, try to be constructive and try to do things by the book, but they are allowing it to happen. The water minister is totally responsible here; it is his department. He can enable these things to happen. We can present it. Do honourable members know what we are talking about at the moment? Out of 3.8 million megalitres a year we are talking about two per cent. It is two per cent of the entire average annual flow. They allow 35 per cent to be taken from the Murray-Darling and 20 per cent in any system. We are talking about two per cent, but we are told, 'Oh no, there is too much risk.' There is two years of advanced business case showing all the evaporation—everything is taken care of, but no, they will always find a way to kill it.

So we do get angry because we are trying to survive out there. We are trying to give them something. We are trying to produce. We are trying to play an active part in funding hospitals and schools, but they will not even let us do that. They will not let us survive. I judge that very harshly and I judge the water minister harshly.